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~ Yahoo Adds More Fees!   ~ eBay Backs Off Change! ~ Songbird News!
~ Madster Bankruptcy!   ~ Digital Piracy Bill!   ~ Microsoft A Bully?!
~ New Worm: Clinton Toon ~ Keeper of the Flame!   ~ 'My eBay Buddy' Plan

            -* Classic Gaming Expo 2002!   *-
           -* Witnesses Pan Microsoft Settlement! *-
          -* Microsoft Enters Critical Penalty Phase! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
   """""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, I guess that it was just a matter of time. I jinxed myself. Just
last week I was talking with co-workers about colds, and how fortunate I was
that I hadn't suffered through one all winter. Sure enough, I'm sitting
here with one heck of a cold! I blame it on the gum surgery I had last
week! That, and stress. And, I had the sutures removed from my mouth last
night and my mouth is still sore.

Naturally, the weather isn't cooperating either. The calendar says that
it's spring, but you'd never know it today. The snow storms that we had
earlier in the week are a memory, but the cold that came through New England
today chilled to the bone! Old Man Winter must have taken Mother Nature
hostage, or something. It's certainly payback time!

Well, it's late getting this issue out. We've got a lot of interesting
stuff for you this week. TJ Andrews is back with us this week with an
interesting tale or two. And Joe Mirando is scaring me even more - we must
be related somehow! He shares an interesting anecdote with his father; and
I'll be damned if my father and I had a similar tale to spin! Lessee, Joe's
father and my father are both fathers; Joe and I are both sons. We could be
related! Nah, it's the cold medication messing with my mind! Before my
head explodes, let's get to the rest of this week's issue.

Until next time...

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                         Find It 2.05

The excellent search tool 'Find It' is updated to version 2.05. Numerous
bug fixes and some new functions.

http://ers.free.fr/find_ite.html

AtarICQ 0.154 Released

Since a few things have been fixed/changed/added since last release, there is a new update available. This time it is however a binary-only release and you will thus need RSC and OVL from 0.153 package.

Summary of changes:

* The routine for creating the config (add new user) is working again
   NOTE: It is still not possible to create a new UIN.

* Pressing CTRL+C when outgoing field was empty crashed aICQ (fixed)

* Removed a faulty which appeared if aICQ was set to display msg dates

* Changes to contact list sliders (seen when having few contacts)

* If a contact that is not present on aICQs local list (might happen
   if it was added to server list by ICQ on PC/Mac) is reported as being
   online, aICQ will add it to the local list.

* A missing fclose to close scrap.txt when pasting is added

* When re-sizing msg window to be smaller, empty rows in beginning of
   the text buffer are removed.

* Program will report if writing logfile to disk was not carried out ok.

* Msg/URL icon will appear in contact list on incoming messages as
   long as aICQ sees them as unread

It might also be worth mentioning that AtarICQ is nominated as best shareware application by readers of MyAtari, so I wish to say thank you to anyone who nominated us! Whatever you wish to put your vote on, do make sure to vote before April 7th.

http://aicq.atari-users.net

OpenSSH v3.1p1 for MiNT Released

Ssh (Secure Shell) is a program for logging into a remote machine and for executing commands in a remote machine. It is intended to replace rlogin and rsh, and provide secure encrypted communications between two untrusted hosts over an insecure network. X11 connections and arbitrary TCP/IP ports can also be forwarded over the secure channel.

The Atari FreeMiNT porting is made by Thomas Binder.

http://wh58-508.st.uni-magdeburg.de/sparemint/html/packages/openssh.html

New Website for Atari Coldfire Project

The new official website about the Coldfire-Atari-clone project (formerly known as xTOS-computer) is available now. It will provide the latest information about the project, the involved people and the available documentation for developers (not much yet, but that will change).

http://acp.atari.org

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I've got nothing Atari-related to talk about this week (again) but I do have a couple of tidbits that I'd like to share with you.

I happened to stop in at my parents' house after work one day this week. As is our habit when I visit, my father and I sat down and just passed interesting tidbits back and forth.

"Didja hear about that iceberg that calved off into the ocean down in Antarctica?" my father asked.

"Yeah", I replied. "53 by 40 miles... about twice the size of Rhode Island", I said. "I guess it'll just wander around the southern part of the Pacific for a while".

Now it was my turn. "Did you hear about the asteroid that whizzed by us last week"?

"Yep", he said, "nobody even knew about it for four days" he said. "How big was it"?

"About 70 yards across" I answered. "It would wipe out a major city if it ever hit land or cause monster tidal waves if it splashed down in an ocean."

"Well, it's going to happen one of these days. There's just too many of those big rocks out there", my father said. "They figure that there's a major asteroid impact every sixty to seventy million years or so. The one that took out the dinosaurs was about sixty five million years ago, so we're due".

Now, my father is a very intelligent guy. He likes to pretend that he's just another working slob, but he's really a "thinking guy". He pretends to have no interest in science or technology, but in reality he likes 'cool stuff' as much as I do. He's also got a somewhat twisted sense of humor.

So, to top off our conversation he smiled and said, "So... I guess all we have to do is get the asteroid to hit that damned iceberg and we'll be all set."

Well, let's see if we can find something slightly less strange on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st Newsgroup
==================================

John Perez asks for help in locating a case for his TT:

"Does anyone out there have a spare TT Case, dead TT, Tower, or ideas where I can find something to house this renegade TT motherboard that I have in storage? Your suggestions would be greatly appreciated."

Dennis Bishop tells John:

"Well, you could check your local 2nd hand shops, most of them have old pc's towers, I've got two towers sitting here that where thrown away."

'M,gamodeste' asks about RAM types:

"I heard that some SIMMs ram are 'byte wide' and some other aren't? What's that? It was not so easy to recognize EDO from FPM, but how to recognize 'byte wide' ones?"

Dave Wade tells M,gamodeste:

"I did not think any SIMMS were "byte wide".

32 pin simms are 16 bits wide,(2 bytes)
72 pin simms are 32 bits wide.(4 bytes)
DIMMS are 72 bits wide.

And as far as I know all allow a single byte to be written."

JØrÔme Ginestet adds:

"The 30 pin simms used in STEs and older PCs are byte-wide.
That is why they are used in pairs on STEs.
PCs required 9 bit-wide for parity checking."

Joseph Place asks about networking via MIDI ports:

"Has anyone here set up a successful MIDI network between STs? If so, what software do you use. I've tried MEDNET, MIDICOM and another program that I don't recall the name of, and haven't achieved positive results yet."

Edward Baiz tells Joe:

"Yes, I did that between my Hades and my STe. What was good about this setup was that on my Hades a partition icon was produced.
Double-clicking on the icon produced folders, each representing the partitions on my STe. I could copy, delete and even run the programs.
It was neat running a program on he STe and having it come up on my Hades. However, if I tried to access the Hades using the STe, the

program crashed probably due to the Hades. Below is the text file
included with the program.

===

        The network uses the MIDI port to allow disk sharing between
        two ST's that are both running MX2NET. The remote
        drives can be used just like your local drives but they will of
        course be slower because of the transfer of the data through the
        MIDI ports.

        The remote drives are defined in the MX2NET.INF file. This is a
        ascii file with the drive parameters all on one line. For example
        if you have   cfr,dgr,eow   in your file.
                        ||| |
                      / | \   \
                     / | \   \
            remote local read   write
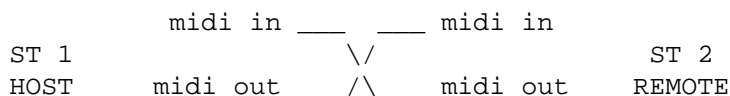   drive drive access access

        You will be able to access remote drive C as your local drive F
        read-only. Remote drive D will be G and remote drive E will be O
        with write access. If you wish to change the drives simply edit
        the MX2NET.INF file, reboot your ST and rerun the MX2NET.PRG.
        A max of 14 drives can be defined with P being the highest. If
        there is no MX2NET.INF file no drives will be defined locally but
        a remote machine still can access your drives.

        The MX2NET.OPT file defines program options. It is an ascii file
        with all option characters in lower case. Current options are:

        t   :   Get GEMDOS date and time from remote ST.
                        Normally your "HOST" ST would not have this option
                        set.

        o   :   Mask over existing drives. If this option is set
                        it is possible to overlay a networked drive ID
                        over a real drive on the local ST by assigning
                        it's ID in the MX2NET.INF file. If this option
                        is not set a cold-boot is needed before restarting
                        MX2NET.

        m   :   Allow memory transfers to and from remote ST.
                        Enables shared memory and remote operation.

        5   :   Remote ST is 520ST. Screen physical memory is
                        found at 78000 HEX.

        Be sure to cross connect the midi cables ie... the MIDI out to
        the MIDI in on the other ST and vice verse.

                        midi in ___ ___ midi in
                ST 1   \/   ST 2
                HOST   midi out ___/___ midi out   REMOTE

        The MX2NET.PRG is a standalone network driver that runs from
        the DESKTOP or another GEM program. It should NOT be installed

in an AUTO folder. If ST 1 is the HOST it should be started
first then start the program on ST 2.

Drive 31 is a special ID that MX2NET uses for network function
calls. Use the rwabs bios call to access these functions.

A call to this ID to read sector 0 will return the local network
status into the buffer.
Sector 1 will return the remote network status.

A write to sector 2 will send the buffer into the keyboard buffer
in the remote ST. Location 0 in the buffer contains the count
while location 1 is the start of the string. The buffer is an array
0..63 of longs.

A read to sector 3 will return in the buffer an array of checksums
of the remote physical screen memory.
Any read or write of a sector more that 3 will read that 512 byte
section(s) of memory to or from the rwabs buffer.

NOTE:

mx2neta.prg   :   RS-232 port version.
netstat.prg   :   read local network stat's.
netstatr.prg   :   read remote network stat's.
netview.prg   :   View remote ST's screen
                                        memory. Use the Undo key
                                        to exit.

status record structure

stat   = RECORD
                inpackets   :   LONGCARD;
                outpackets   :   LONGCARD;
                retrys   :   LONGCARD;
                checksumerrors :   LONGCARD;
                timeouts   :   LONGCARD;
                rwabsreqs   :   LONGCARD;
                resets   :   LONGCARD;
            END;

PS   It is recommended that this program be used for read-only access
      to your remote drives. It is possible to scramble the FAT if
      both machines try to write to the disk at the same time.

==

Mike DePetris tells Joe:

"You may have seen my own MikeNet, but it can only link two STs at a time
and does not work with magic or MiNT (at least I thing so).
It was really I nice program to share drives at MIDI speed, transparent to
TOS and you could redirect any drive letter to another, local or remote."

Martin Holmes asks about using CAB for web surfing:

"I have difficulty getting onto some web sites that do not have the

'www' in the URL. Cab (2.7) on my Falcon tells me the site is blocked
but if I use PC it has no problem displaying the site.
Can anyone explain for me?

While I'm here, Anyone got an Eclipse for sale?"

Martin Tarenskeen asks Martin:

"I'm not sure if it makes any difference, but how exactly did you spell
those URLs ? For example http://yseditor.atari.org should work, but
yseditor.atari.org may not. (Just guessing)"

The first Martin tells the second Martin:

"It doesn't matter if I enter it manually or click on a link the result
is the same. I have also tried different OVL files for CAB but that
doesn't seem to make much difference either."

Dan Ackerman jumps in and tells Martin:

"Something is strange since I can get to sites like this with no problem.
Try http://highwire.atari-users.net/ and see if that works for you. I can
get there with no problems using the following setup

TT030
STiK2
Cab 2.8
OVL 1.4401"

Mike Freeman asks about a problem he's having with STiNG:

"I was going through my AUTO, ACC, and CPX files trying to get Magic
stable on my Falcon (turns out there was an insignificant CPX that was
causing all my problems, which I've now disabled). But now that Magic is
stable, another strange problem has cropped up. When I boot up, my serial
port setup seems fine. I can use Connect to dial into my ISP and see what
my login script should be. But once I run STiNG (which then refuses to
properly see the login prompts given by the ISP), exit it, and run Connect
again, all I get is jumbled random characters instead of the login prompts.

Is STiNG messing up my serial port settings somehow? I've gone through all
my files and settings, and can't find anything. When I was messing with
files, I changed nothing in my serial or STiNG settings, and I was only
disabling files and re-enabling them one at a time (using the .PRG to .PRX
renaming method), and the running order doesn't seem to have changed. What
can I check to help figure this out? For now I can't connect to the Internet
at all with my Falcon, so I can't send anyone any DEFAULT.CFG, etc. files to
check unless I type them into my Mac by hand :(~. So if anyone could help,
it would be greatly appreciated!"

M gamodeste asks Mike:

"Is your HSmodem config correct?"

Mike replies:

"I think it is. It worked fine before, I didn't change it, and it looks about the same as it did before (although I've never been technically savvy enough to know for sure what the settings should be, so maybe that's part of the problem?) Also, it's only when I run STiNG that the problem occurs. After that, accessing the serial port with a Terminal program (like Connect) shows problems that weren't there before running STiNG. Wouldn't an HSmodem problem be there whether I run STiNG or not?"

Grzegorz Pawlik tells Mike:

"I suppose you have to "disable" STing with the STING.CPX module in Control Panel before using *any* application that accesses serial port.

By the way, if you use MagiC, why not install MagX-Net? With GlueStik it is (almost) compatible with STing, and *much* better suited for multitasking."

Greg Goodwin asks Mike:

"Did you perchance reinstall STing lately? I had quite a bit of trouble when I tried to use one version's CPX with another version's dialer."

Mike tells Greg:

"Nope. All I did was rename everything from ".PRG" to ".PRX" (same for ACC's and CPX's) and then rename them back one at a time. Don't have any clue what might have caused this. I'm sure it's some small thing I overlooked or something, but it's really irritating."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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Keeper of the Flame
by Thomas J. Andrews
tj@atarinews.org

Well, I really stepped in it this time - me, a farmer with decades of pasture-walking experience. Last time I told you I was back, that I could now devote the proper time to this column. Then, I disappeared again for months. Oh, I could come up with excuses - the dog ate it, or something. I could blame it on my battle with a PC virus - except that I write the column on my STE. I could blame Tax Time - I do my own taxes, and do most of that work with the STE - but I still could have written once in a while.

The truth, I guess, is that I just got distracted. Other things attracted my attention, and I let them do it. Dana, Joe, feel free to cut my salary in half. No, even that's too much. Cut it to a third. Let's see...a third of nothing is...

Dealing with the virus and its aftermath did take a large chunk of my computing time. It was my own fault, too. In a temporary (I hope!) fit of poor judgement, I opened an unexpected email attachment. I knew better, too.

It took me far too long to realize what was happening, because of my vast Atari experience. Viruses were always a non-issue with the 8-bit, and by the time I got into the ST line it wasn't popular enough for evildoers to bother with. Once identified, an updated old version of Norton Antivirus cleaned things up enough to be usable - or so I thought.

It wasn't long before more problems started to surface. Internet connections became difficult, crashes more frequent, programs unusable. Wiser heads out there are nodding and thinking, "So what's the problem? That's just normal Windows behavior."

I obviously needed to re-install Windows and all the associated programs from scratch, on a pristine hard drive. But, before I could do that I had to back up my data - and the only thing I had to do it on was a stack of floppies. Apparently, the previous owner didn't believe in making backups. On top of that, whenever he installed a downloaded program he deleted the installation file "to reduce clutter" on his hard drive. Completely unacceptable.

A few Ebay auctions later and I had a SCSI card, a couple of Syquest 200Mb removable drives, and a second hard drive. I went with the Syquest drives because I already had some extra cartridges, and I have the vague idea that someday I'll use them to pass files in bulk between the PC and the STE. A few evening download sessions(long ones - I have a slow connection) and I had new installation files for my most important software.

I was ready. I backed up all the data and installation files I could think of to a couple of Syquest cartridges, then, just in case I missed something, I made an image copy of my C drive onto the new drive. A wise precaution, as it turned out. There were three files I would need from that image backup.

The Windows installation went as smoothly as these things ever go. I put the three files I missed on one of the Syquest cartridges, and I don't think I'll need to make another image copy the next time I need to do this job. And, of course, with Windows I WILL need to do it again. So what will I do with that second hard drive? Well, it seems to me it would be a good place for a Linux installation...

*   *   *

Let's see a show of hands... How many of you sold or gave away your 8-bit equipment when you "upgraded" to a PC or Mac, only to wish later you could have it back for just one more game of, well, whatever your favorite was? Come on, show 'em! Uh-huh, I thought so.

There are two ways you could scratch that itch. You could go somewhere like Ebay and buy some Atari stuff, but that can run into some money, and you'd need someplace to store it when you weren't using it. If you had that, you

probably wouldn't have eliminated the stuff in the first place.

The second way is to get an emulator. It's not a perfect solution, but it can be workable. There are several choices, depending on your platform. There are emulators for Windows, MS-DOS, Macintosh, and even Linux. How does one choose the right one?

One good place to start is The Atari 8-Bit Emulator Resource, http://emulators.atari.org (note: no www!). This site contains news articles of the 8-bit emulator scene, and descriptions and reviews of all the different emulators. There are links here to software sources, related projects, other emulator sites, and other Atari pages.

Another good place is The Atari 8-bit New User, Emulator Help FAQ, http://www.sonic.net/~nbs/new_and_emu.html (If you don't want to type all that out, just go to Google and search for "atari emulator faq") Most of the information on this site is geared toward the new Atari user, but there are several nuggets of information on emulators, too - including links to many of the emulator home sites. This site is produced by Bill Kendrick, a long-time 8-bit enthusiast.

Google is a good source of informative sites, too. A mid-March Google search on the phrase 'atari "8-bit" emulator' (use the quotes; forget the apostrophes) yielded 8210 references. Of course, several were duplicates or sub-pages of other sites, but that still leaves plenty of places to look for information.

You'll need software for that emulator, and one of the best places to look for it is XL Search, http://xlsearch.atari.org (again, no www). Another Bill Kendrick site, this one allows you to search through 25503 files on 13 ftp sites for that special PD/Shareware program you've wanted for so long. Some important Atari software sites are represented here, like the University of Michigan Archives and the new APX archive. Many files are available in both .dcm and .atr formats (the latter is for emulators), and the site will even convert a .dcm file into .atr on the fly if necessary. Using Internet Explorer on my PC, search results came up fast and looked comprehensive. Downloads were even faster, much faster than I've come to expect after dealing with the megabyte files for Windows.

So am I going to try an emulator? I thought about it for a while, but I don't think it's for me for right now. I still have five working 8-bit systems. One of them, my original 800, is set up all the time. I still have boxes full of 8-bit software, and I can transfer anything I download with the PC or STE with a null-modem cable. For now, an emulator would just get in the way.

I'm not going to make any promises this time about when I'll be back, but I hope it's sooner than later. My newest project is going to be getting Linux installed on the PC, that is, if I ever get the CDs I need to do it. (How's it coming, Joe?) I'll let you know how that goes next time, and maybe I'll explain a little of how my Mega STE helps me with my taxes. Until then, rest assured that even if I seem to be missing, the Flame still burns brightly, waiting for the Lost Ones to come Home!

--
                        TJ
                 Keeper of the Flame
                         &
         Atari Computer Enthusiast of Syracuse

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PlayStation Gets The Boot!
   """""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Lara Croft News! CGE2K2!
                                     PlayStation 3 - Next Gen!
                                     And more!


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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

             PlayStation 2 Gets Kicked Out Of CeBit

Less than a week after Microsoft chief executive Steve Ballmer told
visitors to the massive CeBIT exhibition in Germany that he wanted to see
a warmer, friendlier Microsoft, his company has become embroiled in a row
with Sony over gaming consoles.

Microsoft complained to the show organizers, Hannover Messe AG, that Sony
was breaching show rules by letting people play on Sony PlayStation 2 game
consoles. Technically, this was right and the Messe was forced to act on
the complaint.

Sony approached Microsoft to find a compromise and entered into protracted
discussions with the Messe for a deal acceptable for all parties, but none
could be found. On Sunday morning Sony started packing up its 27 PS2s. The
show, in Hannover, Germany, officially finishes on Wednesday.

Microsoft officials denied that the company had complained to the Messe.
But the show organizers confirmed that Richard Roy, vice president,
corporate strategy, had complained.

Sony has shown PlayStation consoles for the past three years without any
problem, and the Messe said it would not have worried about the situation
if Microsoft had not complained.

The incident appeared all the more bizarre because Microsoft had been busy
showing the Xbox on its stand with employees demonstrating its console.

             The New Lara Croft Looks Tres Jolie

For more than two years, fans have eagerly awaited the return of Lara
Croft, the video game character, who had disappeared in the collapse of a
tomb at the end of 1999's Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation.

Developers had hinted that Lara, known for her short shorts and buxom figure, as well as her athleticism in search of ancient artifacts, was in for a dramatic makeover. The Internet and video game press has been buzz with rumors and developments.

When she re-emerges today at grand unveiling events in London and San Francisco, the recrafted Croft will be revealed as looking -- surprise! -- pretty much as she always has.

Her creators at gamemaker Core Design considered changing her entire appearance. Indeed, skintight turquoise tops and khaki shorts have been traded in for darker tones, reminiscent of Angelina Jolie's wardrobe in last year's Lara Croft: Tomb Raider movie. And throughout the new game, Lara Croft: Tomb Raider -- The Angel of Darkness, Lara will opt for more casual wear, including jeans.

In keeping with an industry-wide trend toward less cartoonish and more cinematic images in electronic games, "they're trying to make her look more like a real-life character and less like a teenage fantasy," says Crispin Boyer of Electronic Gaming Monthly.

But although she seems slightly reshaped, Lara's improbable physique ultimately remained as untouchable as her brand. "We looked at many scenarios and decided that to change her key attributes would be fundamentally wrong," says Core's Adrian Smith.

And based on the title, tomb raiding remains on the itinerary. The game is due in November for PCs and Sony's PlayStation 2, the only video game console that this and subsequent Tomb Raider games will be available on.

Rather than focusing on her prominent physical attributes, creators are developing Lara's character by exposing her to grittier situations. She's accused of murder and "suddenly everything we know about Lara works against her," Smith says. "She's very much being the pursued."

She'll gain strength, speed and other skills, and interact more fully with other characters. Smith and others also have crafted the Croft Chronicles, a 1,000-page outline with enough action for four more games. "It's almost like The X-Files," he says.

And considering her fan base over the years has expanded well beyond the prototypical teen males, her character development could be a savvy move.

"Lara is taking on a newer, deeper dimension," says Melanie Attia, 24, of Montreal, who moderates a fan forum at www.larasanctuary.com. "It should make her more interesting."

UK's Eidos Seeks Fortune With New Tomb Raider Game

British video games maker Eidos Plc said on Thursday it will launch its long-awaited new Lara Croft Tomb Raider game on November 15, raising hopes of a turnaround for the loss-making company.

The new sequel ''The Angel of Darkness" will be exclusive to Sony's PlayStation 2 and personal computers. Eidos first launched the Tomb Raider series in late 1996 and has so far sold more than 28 million copies.

Eidos had a turbulent year in 2001 with succession of product delays, profit warnings and a change of chief executive. It also went without a new version of Tomb Raider series despite the release of a feature film of Lara's exploits last June because the company felt it needed more time and investment.

Shares in Eidos gained on the Tomb Raider announcement, rising 2.4 percent to 147-1/4 pence at 1105 GMT.

''The launch of the new Tomb Raider character is likely to act as a near-term catalyst," said Tim Boddy, analyst at Goldman Sachs.

Analysts said the launch of new game consoles in Europe should also come to the game maker's aid.

Eidos said Lara will become a stronger and more athletic cyber heroine who interacts with extremely sophisticated characters in the latest game.

''We are confident that Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness will be the biggest and best Tomb Raider game to date," Eidos chief executive Mike McGarvey said in a statement.

Sources told Reuters a sequel to the Tomb Raider movie may debut in 2003 with an early promotional campaign sure to boost the game's sales.

Tomb Raider is the number one selling game on PlayStation in Europe and the United States.

The announcement comes two days after Eidos cut its sales forecasts by more than 10 percent for the year ending in March because of a delay in releasing some new games.

But analysts said Microsoft's Xbox which was introduced in Europe last week and Nintendo's GameCube which will debut in early May should boost the potential market for Eidos games.

Consumers generally reduce spending on video games software for existing consoles ahead of the launch of new hardware, then spending sharply increases once new devices are on the market. Sony's PlayStation 2 was introduced in 2000.

Goldman Sachs has said it expected the current video games cycle to peak at Christmas 2003.

Game Makers Grapple With Online Push

As Sony and Microsoft rush to plug their video game consoles into the Internet, the people who write and publish games are still wondering how to make online gaming work.

That's obvious from discussions and corporate pitches at the Game Developers Conference here, where much of the attention this week has been focused on the financial and technological challenges posed by online gaming.

"I think what you're seeing is people trying to figure out what business models make sense for online gaming," said conference director Alan Yu.

"Especially when you talk about connected consoles, it's a whole new business for them to go online."

Much of the attention has been focused on multiplayer games--titles such as "EverQuest" and "Ultima Online" that offer huge virtual worlds for players to explore. Such games account for the few financial success stories to emerge so far from online gaming, and game publishers hope to push the concept to a much broader audience with upcoming titles based on franchises such as "Star Wars" and "The Sims."

But publishers who enter the online business need to be prepared to spend exponentially greater amounts of time and effort to develop successful online titles, said Eric Todd, development director for "The Sims Online," publisher Electronic Arts' upcoming online version of the smash PC game.

Traditional games can be considered a success if they offer a dozen or so hours of entertainment, but online titles have to keep customers engaged and satisfied for 40 hours a week over many months, posing a much greater quality challenge, Todd said.

"The player has to feel safe making an ongoing investment of time and emotion," he said.

And online publishers have to keep on delivering--if service or support fall off, subscription-paying customers will leave in droves.

"With single-player games, you're selling a product," said Todd. "A massively multiplayer game is really a service that starts with the sale of a product."

Traditional publishers also may not realize how important it is to hook online customers early. Well-managed online forums that allow potential players to discuss an upcoming game create word-of-mouth publicity that can make or break a title well before a product actually ships, said Ralph Koster and Rich Vogel, lead developers for "Ultima Online" who are now working on "Star Wars Galaxies," an upcoming online game based on the George Lucas universe.

"The earlier you create a community, the sooner you lock in a user base," said Koster. "You want them to feel like the game belongs to them."

Online gaming also poses untold technological challenges, as evidenced by the myriad companies at the conference pitching back-end services and products for running online games.

Ann Arbor, Mich.-based Cybernet sells software and consulting services for game publishers to set up efficient online gaming networks that utilize distributed computing techniques to efficiently allocate network resources. Vice President Charles Cohen said that, especially for companies primarily involved in publishing console games, there's increasing recognition that online infrastructure requires outside expertise.

"Especially for the console developers, their distinct competency is making good content," he said. "All the back-end technology--why in the heck would you try to do that from scratch?"

If distributed computing can unravel the building blocks of life, it can probably help make a better version of "Crash Bandicoot."

That appears to be Sony's thinking as the electronics giant moves ahead with development of the next version of its PlayStation video game console.

Speaking at the Game Developers Conference (GDC), an annual trade show for the creative and technological sides of the game industry, Shin'ichi Okamoto, chief technical officer for Sony Computer Entertainment, said research efforts for the PlayStation 3 are focusing on distributed computing, a method for spreading computational tasks across myriad networked computers.

Distributed computing is making headway as a way for researchers to conduct demanding computing experiments, such as an ongoing project by Stanford University to unlock protein structures.

Okamoto said the method also appears to hold the most promise for dramatically boosting the performance of the next PlayStation. Game developers have said they would like the next console to have a thousand times the processing power of the PlayStation 2. There's no way to do that with hardware advances alone, he said.

"Moore's Law is too slow for us," Okamoto said, referring to the long-held truism that semiconductor power doubles roughly every 18 months. "We can't wait 20 years" to achieve a 1,000-fold increase in PlayStation performance, he said.

Okamoto said Sony is working with IBM to apply Big Blue's research in "grid computing," a variation of distributed computing, to the next PlayStation. While he didn't share details, the plan presumably would involve networked game machines sharing software, processing power and data.

Okamoto added that the recently released kit that allows PlayStation 2 users to run Linux software on the console is the foundation for much of the research.

Looking further ahead, Okamoto saw even bigger changes for Sony's game business. "Maybe the PlayStation 6 or 7 will be based on biotechnology," he said.

While Sony focused on the future, Microsoft looked at the recent past. Pete Isensee, lead developer for Microsoft's Xbox Advanced Technology Group, used his GDC talk to deliver a mostly positive critique of the Xbox's journey to the market, lauding a product launch that happened on time and without major bugs, a departure from Microsoft history.

"Microsoft has this stigma about not getting it right until version three," he said. "We didn't have a choice with Xbox. If we didn't get it right with version one, Sony and Nintendo would eat us alive."

Xbox glitches Isensee touched on mainly centered on international issues. The game console's bulky controller repelled Japanese consumers, for instance, forcing Xbox to design a slimmed-down version that comes standard with the Japanese Xbox and as an add-on purchase for U.S. and European users with small mitts.

"There is a perception we didn't know what we were doing when it came to the controller," Isensee said. "What we failed to do is a usability test for a global market. You need to do that, because things that work in the U.S. don't always work in Japan or Europe."

That includes the Xbox start-up screen, which had to be redesigned for the Xbox's European launch because nobody realized that the German "einstellungen" wouldn't fit in the same text space as "settings."

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->A-ONE Gaming Online   -   Online Users Growl & Purr!
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                    Protect Haven-7 Once Again!

March 15, 2002

For immediate release:

ROCHESTER, MN -- Anxious Jaguar fans will be happy to know that Protector: Special Edition (P:SE) is almost here. The official release date is April 10, 2002, and the retail price is an incredible $74.95, which includes the bonus glass-mastered Native Demo CD at no additional charge. Orders may be sent via check/MO or PayPal starting on April 3, 2002.

P:SE builds on the immensely popular Protector for the Atari Jaguar with a bundle of new and ground-breaking enhancements, including 40 all-new levels and gameplay improvements to make the game even more enjoyable and challenging for newcomers and pros alike. More jaw-dropping landscapes and backgrounds are sure to keep players hungering for each new level, and several new songs have been added to the mix as well. All-new for this version are a number of high-color RGB title and special screens throughout the game, and some cool rewards for players who dare to complete the game.

As if that wasn't enough, Songbird owner Carl Forhan also indicated that P:SE will include two incredible features to help spur hobby development and lower costs for future CD-based games: BJL and JagFree CD. BJL is an open hobby protocol for downloading Jaguar games to RAM, and is a cost-effective alternative for developing new games. JagFree CD allows new CD games to be published and played easily on any consumer Jaguar CD unit. And the inclusion of an all-new 2048 byte serial EEPROM for saved game data on P:SE allows room for up to 15 games to hold data in addition to P:SE itself.

Several new JagFree CD software projects are currently under development; more details will be forthcoming soon. Look for the copyrighted JagFree CD logo on all current and future Jaguar CD software to ensure compatibility with the versatile JagFree CD standard.

Songbird Productions is the premier developer and publisher for the Atari Lynx and Jaguar. To keep up to date with the latest news at Songbird Productions, be sure to visit the company web site at

Classic Gaming Expo 2002 Show Dates Announced;
Multiple Anniversary Events Planned

For Immediate Release

Contact John Hardie, Sean Kelly, and Joe Santulli
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CLASSIC GAMING EXPO 2002 SHOW DATES ANNOUNCED; MULTIPLE ANNIVERSARY EVENTS PLANNED

VALLEY STREAM, NY (March 17, 2002) - The organizers of Classic Gaming Expo have announced the dates of the 2002 show to take place at Jackie Gaughan's Plaza Hotel. On Saturday August 10th, and Sunday August 11th, the computer and gaming industry's most innovative pioneers will gather in Las Vegas to attend Classic Gaming Expo 2002. Dubbed "CGE2K2", the fifth annual event will celebrate multiple historical anniversaries and is inspired by a strong, continued commitment to classic game updates and re-releases by the industry's major publishers.

Heading up this year's celebration are several historical video game anniversaries, most notable of which is the thirty-year anniversary of the founding of Atari. Officially formed in 1972, Atari has become a name synonymous with video games and is still in existence today under the guidance of parent company Infogrames. In addition to the formation of Atari, 2002 also marks twenty-five years since the release of their Atari 2600 game system, one of the best-selling consoles of all time.

Other milestones being celebrated at this years Expo include the twenty-year anniversaries of the release of both the Coleco and the Vectrex game systems. These systems, released in 1982, helped to revolutionize the video game industry. "It's amazing to think that all of these important historical events have anniversaries in 2002" said Sean Kelly, co-promoter of Classic Gaming Expo. "In addition, there are several smaller events to commemorate - including our fifth year of organizing CGE."

Other items of interest at this year's show include an updated museum exhibit, numerous additions to the guest speaker list, and the release of several new games for various classic systems. The Classic Gaming Expo museum encompasses hundreds of items including many one-of-a-kind prototypes. The museum contains the largest public display of classic game hardware, software, and memorabilia in the world. "What makes the Classic Gaming Expo Museum so special is the fact that it's comprised of items belonging to dozens of individuals," states co-promoter John Hardie. "This is not just a single person's collection but rather a grouping of items on loan from enthusiasts as well as many of our distinguished guests."

Aside from the numerous keynote speeches by various industry legends throughout the show, CGE 2002 will play host to a large number of classic video game vendors and exhibitors. While many of them will be selling

mint-condition hardware and software from the days of old, others will be
presenting new products for sale for systems such as the Vectrex,
ColecoVision, Atari 2600, 5200, Lynx, and Jaguar as well as many modern-day
consoles.

Other show highlights include various classic console game stations,
tournaments, raffles, door prizes, live music, and an incredible number of
classic coin-operated video games, all set on free play for the attendees.

"We're thankful for the ongoing support and interest shown by the video game
industry," notes co-promoter Joe Santulli. "We feel it's vital that this
history be preserved for generations to come."

Now in its fifth year, Classic Gaming Expo remains the industry's only
annual event that is dedicated to celebrating and preserving the history of
electronic entertainment; bringing together industry pioneers, gaming
enthusiasts, and the media for the ultimate experience in learning,
game-playing and networking. Classic Gaming Expo is a production of CGE
Services, Corp.
(www.cgexpo.com)

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                      A-ONE's Headline News
                The Latest in Computer Technology News
                    Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

                Compaq Shareholders Broadly Approve HP Merger

Compaq Computer Corp. shareholders on Wednesday widely approved
Hewlett-Packard Co.'s nearly $20 billion acquisition of the company in a
clear victory that followed a subdued shareholder meeting.

Unlike the contested battle for HP shareholder votes, in which HP claimed
a narrow victory and opponents have yet to concede defeat, there was no
organized opposition to the merger on the Compaq side and the meeting
ended in 45 minutes with the vote ratio at 9 to 1.

Chief Executive Michael Capellas told shareholders it was a "momentous"
day.

"Both Compaq and HP have long, proud heritages and, believe me, we are
proud of our heritage, but this was about creating the next generation
industry leader," Capellas said.

Compaq's shareholder meeting was only about half-full and very unlike the
rancorous meeting Tuesday of HP shareholders, many of whom booed Chief
Executive Carly Fiorina as she took questions.

The most caustic question from the audience was a request for details
about Capellas' new salary as president of the combined company. He said
no terms have been discussed yet.

Compaq shares fell 32 cents, or 2.87 percent, to $10.82, closely following the drop by Hewlett-Packard, which closed off 60 cents, or 3.19 percent, at $18.20 on the New York Stock Exchange ahead of the Compaq vote.

Since news of the merger was made public on Sept. 3, Compaq shares have fallen 12.39 percent and HP has fallen 21.59 percent, both underperforming No. 1 computer maker International Business Machines Corp. , which rose 5.50 percent in the same period.

HP claimed victory in a tumultuous vote on Tuesday in Cupertino, California, but said it would take weeks to finish counting the ballots and post an official result.

One shareholder who attended the Compaq meeting said he thought the merger would be good -- for Dell Computer Corp. , the No. 1 PC maker and Compaq's chief competitor.

"Historically, mergers like this have diverted management attention from running a business. Right now the economy starting to pick up and Dell pushing aggressively to get market share, this would be a bad time to lose focus trying to do a merger," said Ed Hardin, who owns both Compaq and Dell shares.

"I can't lose either way because I own a lot of Dell stock," he added.

Another said he worried about the impact of the restructuring on Houston, which has been hard hit by the bankruptcy of energy company Enron Corp.

"I've followed Compaq stock up and down for years so I'm a little sad to see it go," said Compaq shareholder Lane Evans.

"But I am concerned primarily about the merger's effect on Houston's economy. We've taken some hard hits lately with Enron and all."

While Compaq shareholders broadly affirmed the combination, merger opponent Walter Hewlett, who led an epic fight against the deal, said the race was too close to call. A source close to him put the margin of victory at 0.5 percentage points.

Hewlett, the son of one of HP's founders, opposed the merger on the grounds it would hurt the company's strong printer division and saddle it with Compaq's low-margin PC business.

HP's Fiorina said the combined companies would have more than $80 billion in revenues and sell everything from PCs to printers to large computer servers, positioning it to compete with top computer company IBM.

Some investors have already turned to examining how the integration of the two companies, faced with a downturn in technology spending, will proceed.

Compaq, once the largest maker of personal computers in the world, cut 9,500 jobs in 2001 and lost $785 million on revenues of $34 billion.

It has been stung in recent years by top-level executive turnover, its own problematic $9.6 billion buyout of Digital Equipment Corp. in 1998 and intense competition from Texas rival Dell Computer Corp., which last year unseated Compaq as the largest seller of PCs.

Shareholders, who backed the deal because of the promise it holds for Compaq to instantly increase its PC market share, question how the

employees will react to the restructuring.

HP, which announced job cuts of 6,000 last year, earned $408 million on revenues of $45 billion in fiscal 2001.

HP and Compaq say they have been working for the past six months on planning the integration of 135,000 employees, devoting 900 employees and 500,000 man-hours to the task. It'll include cutting 15,000 jobs from the new company.

"What does that do to the morale inside the company and what does that do to customer decisions?" said Sunil Reddy, a fund manager for Fifth Third Investment Advisors.

"These are some of the risks you have in the near-term in the next six to 12 months because it's one thing to have everything mapped out on paper and it's another thing to actually execute."

States Say Microsoft Still a Bully

Nine states urged a federal judge on Monday to impose stiff antitrust sanctions against Microsoft, saying the software giant is still using its monopoly power to bully potential competitors like RealNetworks Inc. and the Linux computer operating system.

On the first day of hearings into possible remedies in the antitrust case against Microsoft, the nine states said a proposed settlement with the U.S. Justice Department and nine other states is too weak to stop the company from using its monopoly power in technologies that have arisen since the case began nearly four years ago.

"There's a remarkable similarity between the conduct in the record and the conduct being employed today and what will be available to Microsoft in the future," Brendan Sullivan, an attorney for the dissenting states, told U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly.

The non-settling states said Microsoft withheld technical data from RealNetworks to ensure that RealNetworks' audio and video player would not work as well with Microsoft's Windows operating system as Windows Media Player.

Citing internal Microsoft memos, the nine states also said that in 2000 and 2001 Microsoft pressured Dell Computer Corp. into dropping plans to offer the open-source Linux operating system on some machines it sells.

An attorney representing Microsoft responded by accusing the dissenting states of trying use the remedy hearings to retry the case and level new, unfounded accusations against the company.

"It's pretty clear that the states view this as a second liability trial," Webb told the judge on the first day of hearings that are expected to last eight weeks.

Under a separate proceeding, Kollar-Kotelly is considering whether the settlement reached with the Justice Department in November is in the public interest.

Last June, a federal appeals court threw out some of the charges against Microsoft but upheld a lower court ruling that the company had illegally maintained its Windows software monopoly in personal computer operating systems.

The appellate judges agreed that Microsoft had tried to crush rival Netscape Communications after concluding that Netscape's Navigator Internet browser was a threat to Windows' dominance.

"Those tactics are still at work," Steve Kuney, another attorney representing the non-settling states, told Kollar-Kotelly. "Once something becomes a platform threat, then the same sequence of events unfolds."

Kuney said Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates gave an evasive answer on this subject when questioned by the states' lawyers during depositions to prepare for the remedy hearings.

Kuney said that when asked whether the settlement would allow Microsoft to use the same tactics it employed against Netscape, Gates replied, "There's not enough data in this summary to allow me to answer that."

The states are proposing that Microsoft sell a "modular" version of Windows that would allow computer makers to strip out add-on features like the Internet Explorer browser or Windows media player.

The states also would force Microsoft to disclose more about its software and license its browser to other companies royalty-free.

Microsoft warned that the sanctions sought by the dissenting states would cause havoc in the computer industry and force the company to withdraw its Windows operating system from the market.

"It will have a devastating impact on Microsoft. It will have a devastating impact on the PC ecosystem and particularly consumers," Webb said.

Webb said the states' proposals were out of step with lower-court rulings in the case and were designed to benefit Microsoft's competitors, such as Sun Microsystems Inc. , Oracle Corp. and AOL Time Warner Inc. , which now owns Netscape.

Sun and AOL have filed separate antitrust suits against Microsoft.

The proposed settlement of the government case is designed to remedy the antitrust violations by giving computer makers more freedom to feature rival software on their products, among other things.

Microsoft has scheduled a parade of company executives, economists and legal experts for the remedy hearings to argue that sanctions cannot go beyond the specific wrongdoings cited by the appeals court.

But Sullivan, speaking for non-settling states, urged Kollar-Kotelly to deny Microsoft what he called the "fruits of their monopoly abuse" and to free the software market to allow more competition.

"The plaintiffs are not here to punish Microsoft," Sullivan said. "The plaintiffs' goals are to make Microsoft behave properly."

Former Netscape Chief Says Microsoft Pact No Help

The U.S. government's proposed settlement of the Microsoft Corp. antitrust case would have failed to stop the software giant's illegal behavior toward Netscape in the 1990s, former Netscape Chief Executive Officer James Barksdale testified on Tuesday.

In written testimony to U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly, Barksdale said the settlement plan was full of loopholes and he favored the stiffer sanctions sought by nine states that have refused to sign the settlement.

"As I review Microsoft's proposed remedy, I reach the unfortunate conclusion that it would not have helped Netscape in the mid-1990s by preventing Microsoft's anti-competitive behavior," he said.

Barksdale took the witness stand on the second day of what is expected to be about two months of hearings into possible remedies in the landmark antitrust case.

Under a separate proceeding, Kollar-Kotelly is considering the proposed settlement of the nearly four-year-old case, reached in November between Microsoft and the U.S. Justice Department. Nine other states have agreed to sign the deal.

Last June, a federal appeals court threw out some of the charges against Microsoft but upheld a lower court ruling that the company had illegally maintained its Windows software monopoly in personal computer operating systems.

The appellate judges agreed that Microsoft had tried to crush rival Netscape Communications after concluding that Netscape's Navigator browser was a threat to Windows' dominance.

Barksdale on Tuesday said his company's fortunes declined once Microsoft put Web-browsing software code in the same files that ran the Windows operating system to prevent the Netscape Navigator browser becoming a platform for software developers.

The proposed settlement would give computer makers greater ability to feature rival software by allowing manufacturers to remove access to Microsoft middleware.

The non-settling states, that include California, Iowa and Connecticut, want Microsoft to produce a version of Window's in which "middleware," like the browser and media player, can be removed entirely.

Barksdale said the proposed settlement would just hide Microsoft's middleware from the user while the states' proposal would give consumers real choice and an incentive for programmers to support alternative products.

"Had this remedy been in place during the mid-1990s, Netscape would have been able to compete on the merits," Barksdale wrote of the states' plan.

Netscape was bought in 1999 by online services giant American Online, now AOL Time Warner , where Barksdale sits on the board of directors.

Microsoft has said the non-settling states' proposals are out of step with

lower-court rulings in the case and are designed to benefit Microsoft's competitors, such as Sun Microsystems Inc. , Oracle Corp. and AOL.

Barksdale also was critical of the settlement provisions intended to grant computer makers flexibility to alter the appearance of Windows.

Barksdale said there were loopholes that allowed Microsoft to forbid alterations of Windows when it did not compete with the non-Microsoft software trying to be featured or if the rival software developer had failed to distribute one million copies in the United States the previous year.

He said this last definition could have prevented Netscape Navigator from gaining any user share all when it first came out because Microsoft could have prevented computer makers from offering an icon or other means to access Navigator.

Earlier on Tuesday, Microsoft sought to portray Sun's Java programming language as a product threatened by its own shortcomings rather than any anti-competitive behavior by Microsoft.

Microsoft dropped Java support from Windows XP -- its latest version of Windows -- and the non-settling states want Microsoft to resume support.

The appeals court in June reversed a lower court finding that Microsoft had violated antitrust laws by promoting its own version of Sun's Java but concluded the company had tried to freeze Java out of the market.

Microsoft attorney Steve Holley on Tuesday cited a Sun memo from August 2001 that said some customers, including brokerage Merrill Lynch, found Microsoft's software easier to use.

"All three customers expressed a lack of faith in Sun's ability to perform," the memo said. "There is little doubt we are suffering from an image problem."

Holley said the complaints undercut Sun's contention that Java saves corporate customers money by allowing them to run their computer applications across different platforms.

"These are surprising comments," said Sun vice president Richard Green who reiterated Sun's long-standing charge that Microsoft used its Windows monopoly to try to sabotage Java.

Sun recently filed its own separate antitrust suit against Microsoft for allegedly impeding Sun's business and harming Java.

Ex-Gateway Exec Pans Microsoft Settlement Plan

A proposed antitrust settlement with Microsoft Corp. would allow the software giant to continue to dictate how computer makers configure their machines, a former executive at Gateway Inc. told a federal judge on Thursday.

Peter Ashkin told U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly that even though the settlement with the U.S. Justice Department "purports" to give PC makers more flexibility to feature rival software on their machines, it

would do little, if anything, to change Microsoft's behavior.

He was the fourth witness called by a group of nine states that are seeking tougher sanctions against Microsoft for violations of antitrust law.

Ashkin, who left computer maker Gateway last year for a position at Microsoft rival AOL Time Warner Inc. , said restrictive contracts that Microsoft Corp. imposes on computer makers "remain the centerpiece of its efforts to entrench its operating system monopoly."

But Ashkin, under questioning from Microsoft attorney Richard Pepperman, conceded that he had only worked directly with Microsoft for a year while at Gateway, and that there were no documents to support his claim that Microsoft had used its Windows monopoly to threaten Gateway.

And despite AOL's history of competition with Microsoft and AOL's own antitrust suit against the software titan, Ashkin seemed unaware of the rivalry. "I don't know whether or not (AOL executives) have official views on the case," he said.

Last June, a federal appeals court threw out some of the charges against Microsoft but upheld a lower court ruling that the company had illegally maintained its Windows software monopoly in personal computer operating systems.

The group of states, including California, Iowa and Connecticut, has rejected the proposed settlement of the nearly four-year-old case reached last November with the U.S. Justice Department and nine other states.

The settlement would require Microsoft to give computer makers like Gateway more freedom to feature non-Microsoft software on their machines. It also bars Microsoft from retaliating against computer makers.

Judge Kollar-Kotelly is considering the proposed settlement under a separate proceeding.

The objecting states are proposing more stringent sanctions, including one that would require Microsoft to sell a "modular" version of Windows that would allow computer makers to strip out add-on "middleware" features like the Internet Explorer browser, or Microsoft's media player.

The states' proposal also would force Microsoft to disclose more about its software and license its browser to other companies royalty-free.

Microsoft is arguing that the states' remedies are extreme and that any sanctions should be confined to specific findings upheld by a federal appeals court.

In his written testimony, Ashkin reiterated a long list of accusations that were first aired earlier in the Microsoft trial. He said Microsoft had used a system of rewards and punishments to get them to exclude add-on middleware features that threatened the Windows monopoly.

In 1999, the trial judge in the case concluded that Microsoft had charged Gateway more to license Windows than other PC makers, such as Compaq Computer Corp. , Dell Computer Corp. and Hewlett-Packard Co. .

Ashkin said the sanctions proposed by the dissenting states' are needed to restore competition to the computer business. Among other things, he urged

the judge to ban Microsoft from bundling add-on features into Windows and appoint a "special master" to enforce the agreement.

Microsoft Antitrust Case Enters Critical Penalty Phase

Attorneys general of the nine states opposed to the proposed Microsoft settlement are meeting with the presiding judge in the antitrust case in an effort to convince her that tougher penalties are required to stop Microsoft from continuing its anticompetitive practices in the future.

Microsoft has decried the additional sanctions, claiming that more severe measures would force the removal from the market of its ubiquitous Windows desktop operating system. According to Microsoft, the features that the states would like to make optional -- the Internet Explorer Web browser and Windows Media Player -- are integral to the operating system.

The dissenting states include California, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Utah and West Virginia, plus Washington, D.C.

Hearings are expected to continue for about two months.

The attorneys general are saying Microsoft should offer a so-called "modular" version of Windows, which would let PC manufacturers pick and choose which features they would like to include without fear of retaliation by Microsoft.

The attorneys general are also expected to demand that Microsoft allow rivals access to parts of its source code, enabling competitors to design applications that would work more seamlessly with Windows on both the desktop and server levels.

In addition, the states want to ensure that any penalties levied against Microsoft will apply to newer areas of Microsoft's business, not just to those that held sway when antitrust charges first were levied against the company.

Neal Goldman, director of Internet competitive strategies at Boston-based research firm The Yankee Group, told NewsFactor that he believes the penalties backed by the nine dissenting states are a logical extension of arguments that have been ongoing for some time.

"The federal government and Microsoft are creating a settlement around the crime for which Microsoft was found guilty, [while] the remaining states are trying to convince the judge to do something that will ensure that Microsoft is unable to attempt anything like it again in any market," Goldman said.

Microsoft is expected to rebut the dissenting states' assertions by bringing forward an array of company officials and legal and economic specialists to explain in detail why the measures the states are proposing are excessively harsh and economically damaging.

"Fixing the problem in a generic way is exceedingly difficult without impinging on the industry's growth and benefits to the customer," Goldman said.

And presiding judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly already has conveyed her impression that the dissenting states' arguments are too broad in scope and may stray too far from the original settlement approved by Microsoft and the other nine plaintiff states.

eBay Enlists "Buddy" To Draw AOL User

eBay has brought on a new pitchman for its bidding network on America Online: an instant messenger "buddy."

The online auctioneer has introduced an interactive agent to promote eBay with a limited number of AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) users. Launched last week, the agent, called My eBay Buddy, can be added to AIM's "buddy list"; it interacts with people by answering basic questions about the auction site. For example, AIM users can find out how to sell items, register on eBay or search for merchandise.

The buddy's chief occupation, however, is to direct AOL users back to eBay's Web site to boost auction participation by AOL's 34 million members.

"The idea is to have an interactive component for AOL members to introduce and educate them about eBay," said eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove.

The buddy is the latest facet of eBay's multiyear marketing partnership with AOL, which was designed to cross-promote the two networks. The companies market each other's services through banner advertisements and links throughout their Web sites.

By adding IM as a promotional tool, eBay can appeal to a widening core of people using instant messenger to chat with friends, get information or navigate the Web.

eBay is only the latest company to tap instant messaging for commercial purposes. Music behemoths including Warner Bros. Records and Capital Records have used IM to promote artists and newly launched records.

The buddies have proved popular with teens. Last month, teen site ELLEgirl.com introduced an instant messaging tool targeted at teenage girls, with great success. Since its launch Feb. 19, the agent has drawn nearly 300,000 unique users, according to its creator, New York-based ActiveBuddy.

The interactive agent - which provides information on news and trends in fashion, entertainment and beauty - has also been effective at driving traffic to the ELLEgirl.com Web site. From January to February, traffic to ELLEgirl.com leaped by 83 percent, according to ActiveBuddy.

ActiveBuddy's seminal interactive agent, SmarterChild, similarly answers questions on a number of topics, including news, weather, sports and horoscopes. The tool, available on Yahoo Messenger and AIM, has more than five million users.

eBay's Pursglove said the company does not have plans to develop the eBay buddy for Yahoo or Microsoft instant messengers. The technology is being tested with a limited number of AOL users for only a few months, Pursglove said. He added that the company will evaluate how well consumers respond

to the buddy and then decide whether to extend its use more broadly, by building in tools such as bidding notification, for example.

Yahoo Tacks Fees Onto E-mail, Storage

Yahoo said Thursday that it will soon implement new fees in once-free areas on its service, marking the Web portal's latest effort to boost non-advertising revenue.

The company said it will begin charging for a feature that lets people check their Yahoo e-mail messages from outside services. In addition, the company will limit public access to its data storage service in hopes of persuading people to pay for it.

"For-pay services on Yahoo, originally launched in February 1999, have experienced great acceptance from our base of active registered users, and we expect this adoption to continue to grow," said Yahoo spokeswoman Mary Osako.

Over the past year, Yahoo has begun charging for certain services to counterbalance the crippling effects of the weak advertising environment. Yahoo executives have publicly stated their intention to charge for services that are costly to run, such as data storage within its e-mail, photo and file-sharing areas.

The company recently began charging for specific features on its home-page builder, GeoCities. And earlier this week, Yahoo began surveying customers to gauge their willingness to pay for streaming video.

The first set of fees affect a service that allows Yahoo Mail users to consolidate their e-mail messages from outside accounts accessed through software such as Microsoft Outlook or Qualcomm's Eudora.

Beginning April 24, Yahoo's Mail Forwarding service will cost $29.99 a year, according to a message posted on Yahoo's site. People who subscribe before April 24 will pay $19.99 for the first year.

The paid Mail Forwarding service will allow people to use outside e-mail services to access Yahoo Mail, automatically forward mail to another e-mail account, and send attachments of up to 5MB instead of the current 1.5MB limit. Paying subscribers will not have a Yahoo text advertisement attached to the bottom of their outgoing messages.

In addition to changes in free e-mail, Yahoo plans to pull back on services that rely on data storage. Beginning March 25, nonpaying visitors to Yahoo Photos only will be able to view thumbnails on the page. People who pay for extra storage will be able to view high-resolution files. All visitors will be able to order prints of digital photos.

The company also will place restrictions on a Yahoo Briefcase service that allows people to uploaded files, requiring hosts to pay for extra storage if they want to let non-Yahoo members access files.

Extra storage costs $24.95 a year for 50MB and $34.95 a year for 100MB. The plan also comes in monthly payments of $2.95 and $4.95, respectively. People who have already purchased storage will not be affected by the changes.

For many Yahoo users, the service change was expected. The mood around message boards such as EmailDiscussions.com was one of resignation that the Web is outgrowing its freewheeling past.

"I have sorta expected Yahoo to do something like this," one person's post read.

Al Hogan, a Washington, D.C., computer consultant and Yahoo shareholder, applauded the company for finding a price point that wasn't too expensive.

"They've done their market research; it's hard to argue with $2 a month," Hogan said. "It would be more (of) a pain for me to update everyone that my address has changed. I would rather pay the fee."

Email, Web at Work - Is the Free Lunch Over?

Brace yourselves, corporate drones: one of the last bastions of work place relief -- sneaking in some online shopping or snickering over an email joke -- could be destined for universal banishment.

 Major corporations are increasingly classifying employee email and Internet privileges as potential security hazards, distractions or worse, costly legal dangers in the making.

As a result, companies are considering dramatically curtailing, or even abolishing completely the freedoms, on which employees have grown increasingly reliant over the past few years.

To hear some of the more ardent computer security advocates tell it, the days of sneaking in some online shopping on company time, mass-emailing your pals a Flash-powered shoot-'em-up game or even downloading screensavers could be a thing of the past.

"It is drastic and painful," Raimund Genes, European president of anti-virus software manufacturer Trend Micro, told Reuters. "But I think it is necessary for the future."

The objective is clear, security advisers say.

A healthy dose of IT prevention can eradicate debilitating email-borne worms and limit the likeliness of employees using their speedy desktop Net connection to download copyright-protected tunes, thus triggering a lawsuit.

"The message is: 'I'm afraid you'll have to do it after hours at home, which is where you should be doing it in the first place,"' said Mikko Hypponen, manager of anti-virus research for Finish-based F-Secure Corp.

Hypponen added some Fortune 100 companies are looking to step up security measures beyond firewalls, which bar access to sites with racy or inflammatory content. They are looking to ban Internet usage for all but select, authorized personnel.

The biggest developments are around email prevention, experts say. Elaborate content filtering software, which can run upwards of $30,000 to install, can block all but the tamest incoming emails, and most

attachments, said Trend Micro's Genes.

Corporations, particularly those that were stung hard by the wave of virus and worm attacks during the past two years, are considering it a top priority.

"We started full email and Web surfing prevention as a safety initiative in 1999," a chief security officer at one of Germany's largest employers, an energy firm, told Reuters.

For many employees at the company, Web surfing is confined to specially designated PCs, and the email server has been tailored to intercept incoming emails which contain a range of file attachments, he said.

Among the nearly 100 email attachments outlawed by the company are: screen savers, digital greeting cards, and the ubiquitous ".exe," or executable file, a standard format needed to run most computer applications and a common target for virus authors.

The security officer said employees are gradually adjusting to the strict policy. It has already scored points with management though, he said, as no virus or worm has infiltrated the firm's defenses during the past three years.

But instituting these new security measures can be a costly and labor-intensive investment, experts say, likely discouraging firms with meager IT budgets from upgrading beyond the status quo.

"It's a question of resources," said a spokeswoman at UK-based Sophos Anti-Virus. "If you have one or two guys implementing IT at your organization, it's not going to make much sense."

"But it certainly makes sense for the large corporates," she continued. "We are likely to see a clampdown in the months and years to come, which is a shame because the Net is a pretty fun place to be some days."

                    eBay Backs Off Privacy-policy Change

eBay is backing off of a controversial revision to its privacy policy.

The revision had said that eBay might make statements regarding privacy rules on its site that conflict with its official privacy policy. In those cases, members had to agree that only the official privacy policy was the true statement of eBay's rules.

eBay is now updating that revision to encourage members to read the company's official policy if they have questions about eBay's rules on privacy.

"These are changes that were suggested to us," eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove said Tuesday. "The suggestion was to simply clarify it, simply make it easier to understand. We're going to say the same thing, only a little bit differently."

The newly updated privacy policy, which has not yet been posted to eBay's site, will go into effect for most members around April 19, Pursglove said, and for new members on Tuesday.

The change of the conflicting language is welcome, but it's just a start, said Jason Catlett, president of privacy advocate Junkbusters.

"This was the first change that needed to be made," Catlett said. "But there are still a lot of other problems with the privacy policy. It's still far from satisfactory."

Watchdog group TRUSTe had several objections to the privacy revisions, spokesman Dave Steer said. One was that eBay did not originally label the revised policy as a "draft," he said.

"It's important to us that eBay be completely consistent in its policies," Steer said. "It's all about clarity, really being clear to the user that they know what's going on."

The criticism from TRUSTe over the changes marked the second time in a year that the watchdog organization and eBay have been at odds over the company's privacy policy. Last year, TRUSTe criticized eBay when the company reset the personalized settings of millions of its customers from "no" to "yes" on questions such as: "Do you want to receive calls from telemarketers."

eBay notified members last month that it was updating its user agreement and privacy policy. The changes immediately drew criticism from auction watchdogs and privacy advocates, who charged that the company was making it easier to disclose members' personal information or ban them from the site.

Catlett had taken special offense to the portion of the revised privacy policy that mentioned the multiple and possibly conflicting privacy statements.

He had said that the change would allow the company to misrepresent its policies to unsuspecting members, not to mention Web browsers that have built-in privacy protection features. Browsers such as Internet Explorer 6.0 do not depend on a company's full privacy policy, but on a concise summary of a company's privacy principles to guard against unwanted cookies.

Cookies are small data files written to a person's hard drive when he or she views certain sites with an Internet browser. The files contain information that the site can use to track such things as passwords, lists of pages visited and the date when a person last looked at a certain page.

Under the original revision, eBay might persuade a Web browser to accept cookies that it might not otherwise accept, by having a privacy summary that differed from its full privacy policy, Catlett warned. Catlett responded by filing a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission.

For its part, eBay said it is not yet using the browser-targeted privacy summaries, Pursglove said. eBay does provide summaries of its privacy policy that people can read, as well as charts that indicate what information it will and won't share.

In addition to Junkbusters and TRUSTe, the Center for Democracy and Technology also criticized the original revision, Pursglove said. The FTC complaint and the criticism from the privacy advocates helped persuade eBay to change it.

"They all agreed that we could clarify the language and make it easier to understand," he said.

Although other parts of the user agreement and privacy policy drew criticism, eBay is only changing the one provision about conflicting terms, Pursglove said.

Senator Introduces Long-Awaited Digital Piracy Bill

A key senator introduced much-anticipated legislation on Thursday that would prevent computers and other electronic devices from playing unauthorized music, movies or other copyrighted material.

Responding to concerns about unauthorized sharing of digital media over the Internet, Sen. Ernest Hollings introduced a bill that would require Silicon Valley and Hollywood to agree on a standard to stop digital piracy.

Internet piracy has been blamed by the music industry for disappointing 2001 sales, and top movie lobbyist Jack Valenti has said it is a concern as well.

Hollywood and Silicon Valley would be required to come up with a technology that would prevent computers and other digital-media devices from playing back files that did not contain an industry stamp of approval.

If the two sides could not reach agreement within one year, the government would step in and mandate a solution.

The South Carolina Democrat said the bill would encourage media companies to make more material available online, encouraging more consumers to sign up for high-speed "broadband" Internet connections and digital television sets.

The bill comes three weeks after a hearing in Hollings' Commerce and Science Committee in which Walt Disney Co. and other media giants accused technology firms like Intel Corp . of profiting from digital piracy.

Hollings' solution, backed by Disney would modify personal computers to block piracy. At the hearing, an Intel executive said that Disney wanted to dictate how computers would be designed, crippling their functionality.

The two industries have made progress on standards to protect digital television broadcasts, but remain far apart on approaches to stop online piracy.

Hollings has circulated draft versions of the bill to high-tech and media companies since last summer with the hopes of encouraging a private solution.

But in a statement, the senator said the two sides needed the threat of legislation the make further progress.

"Given the pace of private talks so far, the private sector needs a nudge," Hollings said. "The government can provide that nudge."

The bill would preserve traditional "fair use" rights by allowing consumers to make copies for personal use, said a Hollings aide.

Co-sponsors include Republican Ted Stevens of Alaska, and Democrats Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, John Breaux of Louisiana, Bill Nelson of Florida, and Dianne Feinstein of California.

Disney CEO Michael Eisner welcomed Hollings' move.

"The bill provides the needed discipline of a deadline for the conclusion of industry negotiations," Eisner said in a statement.

An Intel spokesman was less pleased.

"It's a bad idea, we oppose it," said Doug Comer, director for legal affairs in Intel's Washington office.

Madster Files for Bankruptcy

Online music- and video-sharing service Madster has filed for bankruptcy protection, its operator said on Tuesday, temporarily halting civil suits filed against it by major music and movie companies.

 Madster creator and president Johnny Deep, in a note posted on the Madster Web site, said he filed for bankruptcy in federal court for the Northern District of New York.

Deep did not indicate under which chapter of the bankruptcy code he had filed.

He also said he had been granted a stay in federal suits filed against Madster in Chicago by the Motion Picture Association of America and the Recording Industry Association of America, representing the major movie studios and record labels.

The two associations allege that Madster is knowingly allowing its users to trade digital versions of copyrighted works, such as songs and movies, in violation of federal law.

However, Deep has claimed to the court that the movie and music industries have engaged in anti-competitive actions designed to inflate prices for their works.

"I have not yet begun to fight," Deep said on his site. He also said Madster's operations will not be affected by the bankruptcy filing.

Google Takes On Supercomputing

Google has begun an experiment that could turn its modest toolbar software into a supercomputer to tackle scientific problems such as untangling genetic codes.

The Mountain View, Calif.-based Internet search company invited 500 people to try out a new version of its toolbar that lets Windows users donate their computers' otherwise unused processing power to the Folding@home

project at Stanford University. The project seeks to figure out how genetic information is converted into proteins, complex molecules whose three-dimensional structure is key to everything from fighting off a cold to transporting oxygen around the body.

The work is the latest example of the distributed computing movement, in which computing jobs are farmed out in small chunks to ordinary PCs across the Internet, finding a use for otherwise untapped processing cycles. The movement has had grand ambitions to cure cancer, but thus far its chief successes have been curiosities such as the discovery of gigantic prime numbers.

There's no denying the popular appeal of some of the projects, however, which can pit hundreds of thousands of participants in contests to see who can crunch the most numbers.

The Google Compute project illustrates how the approach to even the most ornery problems of computing science is changing. Supercomputers once were isolated, expensive systems affordable only to the likes of aerospace companies, national laboratories and well-funded universities. But all that is changing with the arrival of the Internet, omnipresent PCs and ever-faster network technology.

"The main motivations were to try to leverage Google's expertise with large computer systems and to try to give something back to science," said Susan Wojcicki, a Google product management director and the head of the Google Compute project.

Google co-founder Sergey Brin initiated the project, Wojcicki said, and people started trying the software two weeks ago. An option on Google's toolbar lets the participants in the project download the necessary software to their computer. Google is considering offering the program to a larger audience, Wojcicki added.

"From what I saw, it simply rocks!" said one enthusiastic person who sampled the software. "When I move my mouse across that little DNA icon, it tells me what protein it is folding and what percentage it has completed."

Google likely will expand the program to include other scientific endeavors, and possibly even computational problems, to benefit its search business, Wojcicki said. But Google Compute isn't likely to become a source of revenue.

"You never want to say never, but the goal now is to contribute something to science. We have enough fish to fry in our current businesses," Wojcicki said.

Google, having secured its position as a top search engine, has been pulling out all the stops to increase its revenue--likely in anticipation of an initial public offering, some believe. The company's grander aspirations have been visible in features such as a news feed, targeted advertisements, commercial search services and catalogs.

Distributed computing is just one part of the overhaul of the supercomputing world. For one, existing supercomputers are being linked into "grids" of shared computing and storage resources such as the Energy Department's Science Grid, unveiled Friday. For another, groups of inexpensive Linux (news - web sites) computers can be linked with high-speed networks to form a cheap "Beowulf" computer.

Yet distributed computing has given supercomputing efforts popular appeal.

The best-known distributed computing project has been SETI@home, which scans radio telescope signals for extraterrestrial communication signals. Distributed computing began with more abstruse projects, however, such as hunts for Mersenne prime numbers, optimal Golomb rulers and Fermat numbers.

Though SETI@home hasn't uncovered any alien chitchat, distributed computing has had its successes. Most recently, one effort with 210,000 participating computers uncovered a 4,053,946-digit prime number, the largest found so far.

Google's toolbar addresses one of the key obstacles in distributed computing: propagating the software to all the computers involved in the effort. And if people are eager to participate in the distributed computing program, they might be more inclined to install the toolbar, which beefs up Web browsers with links to Google's search engine.

The Google Compute software works on Windows 98, Me, 2000 and XP, Google said.

In the more exuberant climate of Internet business of the late 1990s, several start-ups seized the idea that money could be made by selling processing power to pharmaceutical companies and others.

The prospect faded, though; one site, Popular Power, shut down, and e-mail provider Juno Online Services ran into controversy when it tried out the idea. Distributed computing as a business prospect today generally is focused on using a corporation's own computers, a much more controlled and predictable environment than the entire Internet.

Companies involved in this arena included United Devices, Turbolinux, Sun Microsystems, Parabon Computation, Platform Computing and Avaki, formerly Applied MetaComputing.

Some companies still sponsor distributed computing projects that extend to the entire Internet, however. United Devices' network helped to screen molecules that could be related to anthrax. And Parabon is involved with the Compute Against Cancer effort to boost cancer research.

Internet Worm Disguised as Clinton Cartoon Spreads

An Internet worm, disguised as a screensaving cartoon of former U.S. President Bill Clinton playing the saxophone, that can delete files and slow network connections was spreading on Friday, antivirus software vendors said.

The worm, dubbed "MyLife.b," was rated a medium risk because of its demonstrated ability to lure users to open it and the way it tries to delete files, said April Goostree, virus research manager at McAfee.com Corp.

It affects Microsoft Outlook users. However, the Outlook E-mail Security Update, downloadable for Office 2000 and 98 users and included in Outlook 2002, blocks executable attachments, Microsoft said.

The worm is embedded in an executable file in the attachment that comes with an e-mail with the subject line "bill caricature."

The e-mail also attempts to mislead people into thinking it has been scanned by an antivirus vendor and found to be safe. In the body of the e-mail is the message "No Viruse Found" (sic) and "MCAFEE.COM." However, Goostree said anti-virus messages are never delivered to customers that way.

Once the attachment is opened, the worm drops a copy of itself in the computers' system folder and if the computer is rebooted between the hours of 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. it will try to delete all files on the C, D, E and F drives and certain files in the Windows system directory, according to Goostree.

The worm also may slow down computer users' e-mail and Internet connections, according to McAfee.com.

Goostree said she did not know where the worm originated, but noted that Australia has been hit particularly hard. The worm appeared to have started slowing down by midday on Friday, she said.

British-based e-mail security services provider MessageLabs Inc. said MyLife was the most active virus on Friday, with nearly 2,000 samples intercepted. It has affected users in 29 countries, most strongly in Great Britain, the United States and Australia, the company's Web site said.

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